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ABSTRACT

This short booklet describes the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress' (NAEP) survey of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes, of students aged nine, thirteen, and seventeen and young adults in America to determine their career and occupational development (which included many elements of career education). (The survey, conducted as one way of evaluating the need for career education programs, took place during the 1973-74 school year. It describes skill levels existing before large numbers of career education programs were implemented, and was intended to suggest areas to consider in designing, implementing, and evaluating career education programs.) Results presented are responses for the nine- and seventeen-year-olds and cover the following areas: looking for information (Where do you go to find out about possible careers?); job-seeking skills; job knowledge (duties, pay, and training requirements); job aspirations (What kinds of jobs do American young people look forward to? Are their aspirations in tune with today's economic realities?); sex stereotypes (interests, skills, aspirations); job discrimination; and differences in achievement. Sources of additional information on the National Assessment are included. (SH)

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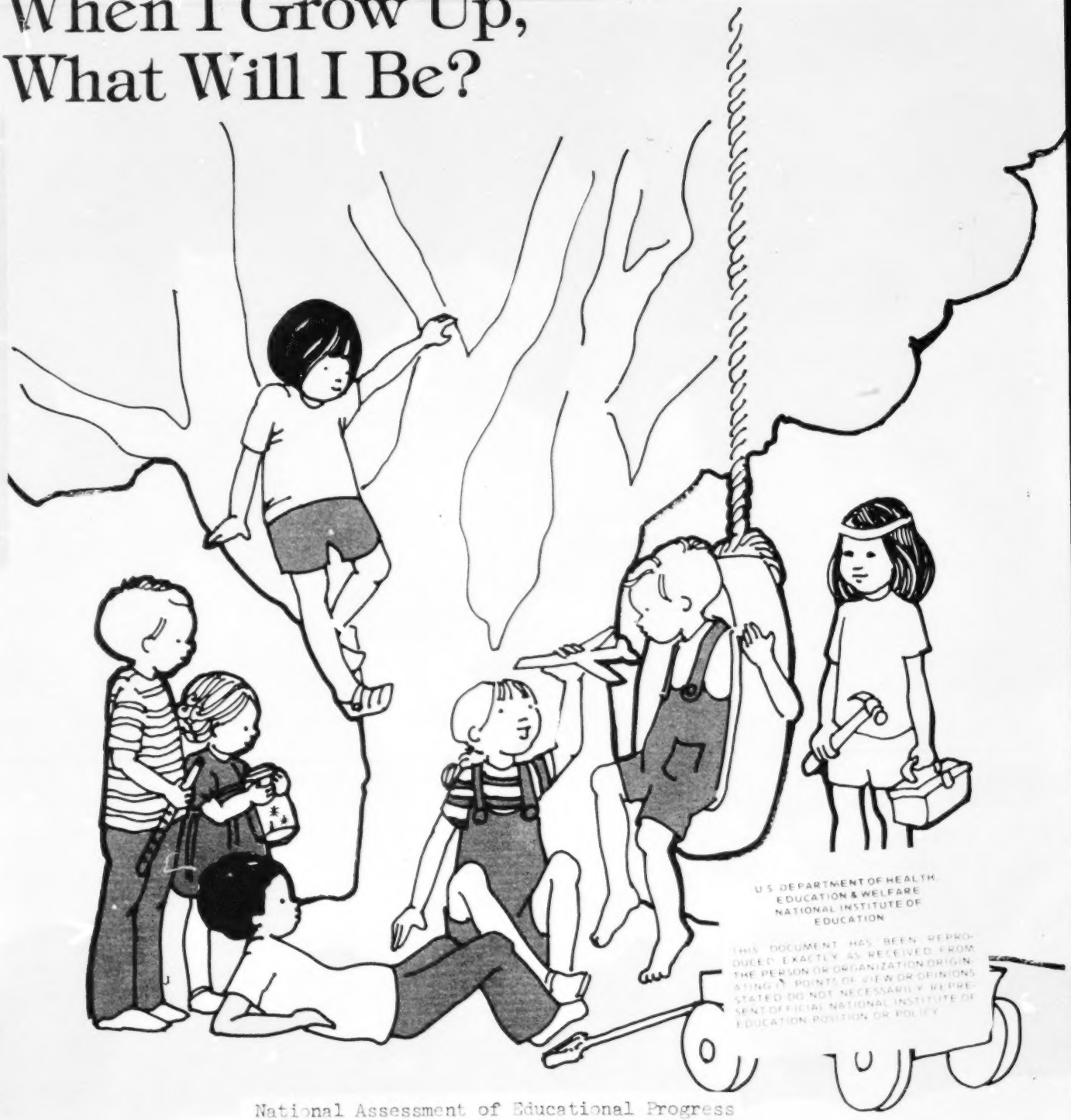

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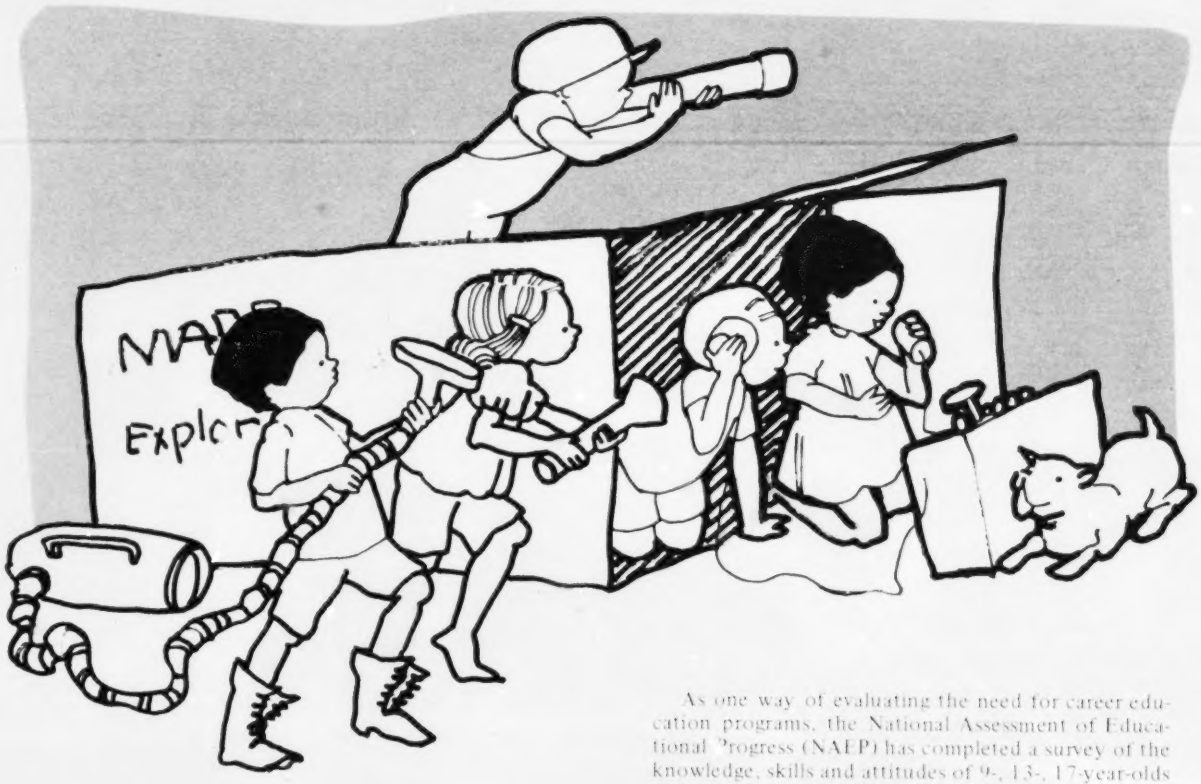


When I Grow Up, What Will I Be?

When I grow up, what will I be? At age five, the answer seems simple — a doctor, a firefighter, a nurse. But by 17, the question becomes more urgent and the answers more complex. How well are the schools doing in helping students to make career choices? How well-informed are students leaving school about opportunities and ways to choose among these opportunities?

"Career education" has emerged as a major goal for the nation's schools during the first half of the 1970s. The concept of career education goes beyond training for specific occupations to an emphasis on the making of informed choices among a variety of work possibilities, both paid and unpaid, based upon knowledge of one's own interests and abilities, knowledge about a wide range of careers and possession of basic academic skills. Although career education is not really a new goal for the schools, its treatment as a separate topic has been somewhat of an innovation.

As one way of evaluating the need for career education programs, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has completed a survey of the knowledge, skills and attitudes of 9-, 13-, 17-year-olds and young adult Americans in career and occupational development (which included many elements of career education). The National Assessment, a project of the Education Commission of the States, conducts assessments under contract to the National Center for Education Statistics.

The survey of career and occupational development, which took place during the 1973-74 school year, describes skill levels existing before large numbers of career education programs were implemented. It revealed some surprising — and some not so surprising — gaps in students' information. In sharing these results, we hope to suggest areas to consider in designing, implementing and evaluating career education programs.

Looking for Information

Where do you go to find out about possible careers? And how do you discover enough about yourself to know where your interests and abilities lie?

National Assessment found that:

- Seventeen-year-olds are not [illegible] likely to

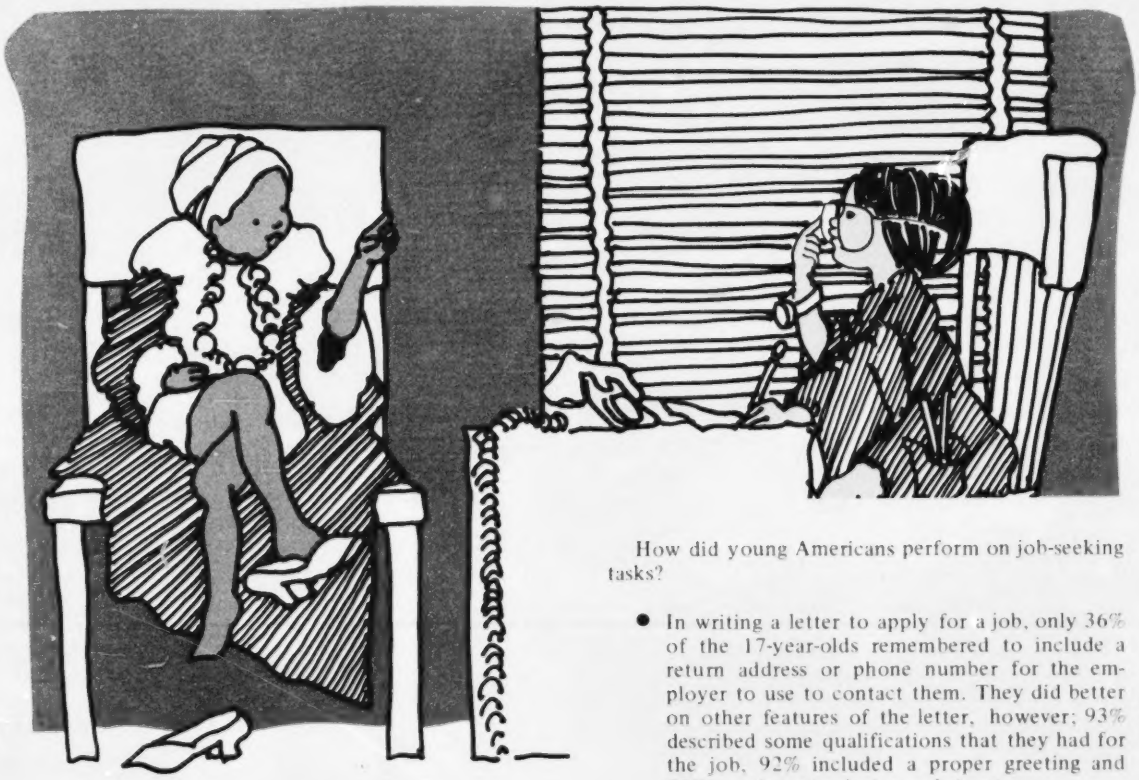
consult a teacher or a counselor about their future plans. When asked whom they had talked to, only 35% mentioned a school counselor or adviser and only 14% mentioned a teacher. Seventeen-year-olds were more likely to discuss their plans with parents (62%) or with friends (38%). School personnel generally have more access to information about careers and objective data on student abilities; however, students turn to their parents most often for advice. It might be most beneficial to help parents acquire information and skills to advise their children.

- Only two out of five 17-year-olds said they had taken an aptitude test, and only 16% stated that they had discussed the results with someone in a position to advise them.

- Virtually all (95%) of the 13- and 17-year-olds could name an activity in which they would like to improve their skills; however, only 74% of the 13-year-olds and 78% of the 17-year-olds had actually taken steps to find out how to do so.

- Most 9-year-olds could identify some personal strengths and weaknesses; 92% named at least one thing they did well, and 88% identified at least one thing they did poorly.

- Nearly 60% of the 13-year-olds and over 80% of the 17-year-olds listed five or more things that they should think about in choosing a job or career. Working conditions, pay and benefits of a potential job were most often mentioned; personal satisfaction, interests and goals were mentioned next most often.



Job-Seeking Skills

After picking the job that you want, you have to go out and get it. And getting a job shouldn't be left to chance. To be sure, luck can enter in – but luck should be backed up by solid job-seeking skills.

How did young Americans perform on job-seeking tasks?

- In writing a letter to apply for a job, only 36% of the 17-year-olds remembered to include a return address or phone number for the employer to use to contact them. They did better on other features of the letter, however; 93% described some qualifications that they had for the job, 92% included a proper greeting and 80% an adequate closing and signature.

- To assess knowledge of good job interview practices, 13-year-olds and 17-year-olds who were in school at the time of the assessment were asked to watch a movie of a job interview and to list five things that the job-seeker did wrong in each of three scenes. Table 1 shows

percentages of 13- and 17-year-olds recognizing four or more bad practices in each scene. A considerable improvement occurs between ages 13 and 17.

TABLE 1. Percentages Successfully Recognizing Four or More Bad Job Interview Practices

	13-Year-Olds	17-Year-Olds
Scene 1	54%	78%
Scene 2	42	78
Scene 3	38	69

On this task, females did better than males at both ages; blacks did less well than whites; and those living in advantaged urban areas (areas with a high proportion of professional and managerial workers) did better than those from disadvantaged urban areas (areas with high proportions of those unemployed and on welfare).

- When asked to state ways they could investigate a job that interested them, slightly over half the 13-year-olds and nearly three-quarters of the 17-year-olds gave two or more acceptable responses. Most popular responses were to talk to people in the field, read about the job and contact a personnel office. Only 28% of the 17-year-olds and 5% of the 13-year-olds named a counselor, adviser or guidance officer.

- Thirteen- and 17-year-olds listed questions they would ask before applying for a job. Over 90% at each age level asked at least three reasonable questions; over two-thirds asked at least five. Most frequently asked questions concerned hours, wages and duties. Females asked more "acceptable" questions than males; blacks and people living in urban disadvantaged areas performed less well than the national average.

Job Knowledge

Knowledge about the duties, pay and training requirements of a wide variety of jobs is an important part of career education. If exposure to a range of jobs is lacking, students may consider only jobs that are highly visible in their community or that their parents or friends hold. Percentages of success on some of the job-knowledge questions were quite high; others showed serious deficiencies in information.

- Only about one-fourth of the 17-year-olds knew that becoming a tool designer requires a longer training period than a draftsperson, model or airlines ticket agent. On five questions

about training needed for various occupations, an average of 54% of the 17-year-olds answered the questions correctly.

- Half the 13-year-olds and nearly four out of five 17-year-olds correctly named a bank teller after listening to a description of the job duties.

- Two-thirds of the 17-year-olds knew that a plumber generally makes more money than a tailor, bus driver or security guard.

- Half of the 17-year-olds correctly answered six of seven questions asking whether union membership was generally required for various jobs. Males were more familiar with typical labor union requirements than females.

- Knowledge about jobs increased from age 13 to 17. On a set of 35 items given to both age groups, an average of 68% of the 13-year-olds and 80% of the 17-year-olds answered correctly.

- Performance of blacks on questions about specific jobs was 11 percentage points below the national level at age 13 and 12 percentage points below at age 17. Performance of those living in disadvantaged urban areas was also below the national average at both age levels.

The school can be a major source of student information about jobs. However, knowledge about jobs often is not included in the curriculum. School administrators and school board members should seriously consider the inclusion of more job-related material in the school program.

Job Aspirations

What kinds of jobs do American young people look forward to? Are their aspirations in tune with today's economic realities? Unfortunately, the National Assessment data indicate somewhat of a mismatch.

- Forty-four percent of the 17-year-olds who were in school and 52% of the 13-year-olds named occupations categorized as "professional" for their first choice as a future job. However, only 15% of the adults aged 26-35 surveyed by NAEP stated that at the time of the assessment they held a job categorized as professional. And Department of Labor Statistics indicate that only one of four jobs requires a college education, which is usually needed for a professional job. Many more 17-year-olds appear to aspire to professional jobs than will be able to obtain them given the current economic situation.

- Many 17-year-olds do not have a clear idea of the skills and abilities needed for the jobs to which they aspire. Only 49% of them were able to give two or more skills and/or abilities required for the job they named as their first choice.

- Females at both ages were much more likely than males to plan to be clerical workers, while crafts categories were practically the exclusive province of males. There were slightly more females among 17-year-olds whose first choice was a professional position.

- Approximately equal percentages of blacks and whites aspired to professional jobs. A higher percentage of black than white 17-year-olds were considering technician jobs; percentages choosing clerical, operative and crafts positions did not differ significantly by race.

- Aspirations in urban disadvantaged communities did not differ markedly from those found nationwide. The percentage desiring a professional career was still high (41%).

These statistics do not mean that high aspirations should necessarily be discouraged. However, students should be aware of the range of opportunities available to them and should acquire decision-making skills so they can choose a career compatible with their interests, capabilities and goals.

Sex Stereotypes

Boys and girls show differences in interests, skills and aspirations. Differences by themselves are not necessarily bad, but they may limit people's opportunities without their awareness. These differences need to be examined in career education programs so that people can make their choices, not just follow some arbitrarily defined role.

- Female aspirations may be shifting – housewife was listed as first choice by only 3% of the 17-year-old females attending school at the time of the assessment. When they were asked to list five choices, only 9% mentioned housewife at least once.

- Females tend to name teacher, nurse or clerical worker as their first choice for a future job. Forty-one percent of the 17-year-old females aspired to jobs in these three categories with 11% wishing to be teachers, 13% naming nurse or other health professional excepting doctor and 17% choosing some type of clerical work.

- When asked to name things they did well and poorly, 9- and 13-year-old males showed a much greater interest in group sports than did females. Both sexes had an interest in individual sports; girls were more likely to name household skills, music and academic pursuits. In evaluating how well they did an activity, more 9- and 13-year-old males supported their opinions by comparing themselves with others, while females were more likely to judge by tests, grades or what other people said.

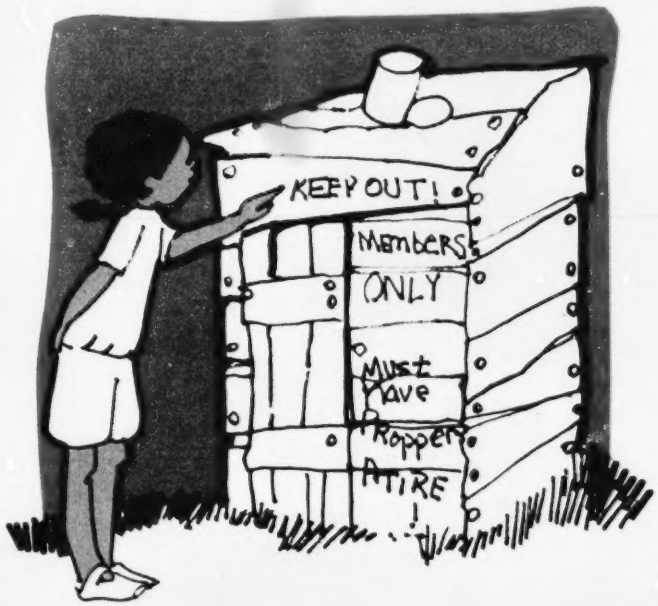
- At age 13, females had had considerably more experience with household chores, while males had more often built or repaired something.

Job Discrimination

Seventeen-year-olds lack an awareness of discriminatory practices.

- Students were given an airline policy restricting flight attendants to unmarried women between the ages of 21 and 35 and asked how they would change the policy. Sixty-six percent liberalized the marriage policy and 49% liberalized the age policy; only 8% lifted the restriction that flight attendants be women. Some students actually made the policy more restrictive.

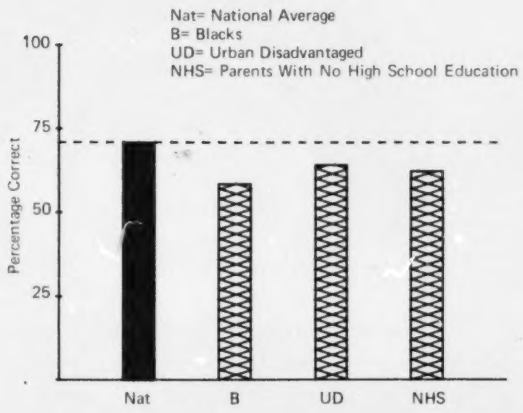
- Asked to list reasons that people who are willing to work might find it hard to get a job, only 40% of the 17-year-olds mentioned discrimination (on the basis of race, sex, age or ethnic origin). Seventeen-year-olds were most likely to respond that such people either lacked the necessary experience or training or that jobs were not available.



Differences in Achievement

The study findings indicate that students from disadvantaged backgrounds will generally have trouble in competing for jobs. On the average, people from disadvantaged urban areas, blacks, people from the Southeast and people whose parents have low levels of education had more difficulty with career and occupational skills and concepts than the rest of the country. In general, the difference in performance was most evident on basic skills (for example, mathematics and writing) and knowledge about jobs; differences in attitudes towards jobs and work-related experiences were less marked. Figure 1 shows the difference between the average national performance and the average performance of several different population groups for 17-year-old students.

FIGURE 1. Average Performance of 17-Year-Old Students on Career Development Items



Directions for Career Education

The facts presented here are not all discouraging – certainly some of America's teen-agers are able to make informed career choices. But the picture is not as bright as it could be. Too often, those most in need of career-finding skills – blacks, residents of low-socioeconomic areas, people whose parents had little education – are those who are most lacking. Too often students are left to gather information and make choices with little organized guidance or instruction.

Many people have roles to play in remedying this situation. Parents could acquire information and skills to advise their children. Teachers could provide information about the work world, assist students in developing general decision-making and problem-solving skills and help students to apply instruction in the basic skills to the world of work. Counselors could not only make students more aware of their services but also actively seek to involve students in the counseling process. School administrators could encourage the introduction and implementation of well-planned career education programs. School board members could be instrumental in gaining community support for such programs.

Career education holds great promise for making the classroom relevant to the work place. If this promise is to be realized, career education must become a vital part of the schools' curricula.

For More Information

National Assessment has published several reports on the assessment of career and occupational development. The assessment also has produced objectives for career and occupational development and a volume showing many of the test items used in the survey.

The U.S. Office of Education has extensive information available on career education programs currently in operation across the country. Staff of the Office of Education have developed a set of goals for career education and strategies for designing and implementing career education programs.

For more information contact: National Assessment of Educational Progress, Suite 700, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, Colorado 80295.

Publications Available From NAEP*

Adult Work Skills and Knowledge, No. 05-COD-01 (S/N 017-080-01576-5). $1.50

Career and Occupational Development: An Overview, No. 05-COD-00 (S/N 017-080-01645-1). 1.20

Career and Occupational Development: Basic Work Skills, No. 05-COD-02 (S/N 017-080-01687-7). 1.10

Career and Occupational Development: Objectives (order directly from NAEP). 1.00

Career and Occupational Development Technical Report: Exercise Volume, No. 05-COD-20 (S/N to be assigned). approx. 10.00

Career and Occupational Development Technical Report: Summary Volume, No. 05-COD-21 (Forthcoming).

Publications Available From USOE*

Introduction to Career Education: A Policy Paper, (DHEW(OE) 75-00504). $1.05

K-12 Classroom Teachers and Career Education: The Beautiful People GPO 017-080-01537-4 1.00

Schools, Counselors and Career Education GGPO 017-080-01528-5 .55

Community Resources for Career Education GPO 017-080-01615-0 .55

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